

a bunch of jopper one-shots by orphan_account

Category: Stranger Things (TV 2016)

Genre: F/M, Fluff, One-Shots, Probably angst at some point, Tumblr Prompts, basically anything short i write will eventually end up here, jopper fic, jopper one shots, joyce x hopper, prompts

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Summary:

Jopper prompts from tumblr. One-shots I write because I can't be arsed to write a full-length fic. Jopper snippets galore.

1. as i sit here i am not alone

Author's Note:

I wrote this ages ago (so apologies if it's a little... meh) and it's just been sitting on my laptop, so I figured I may as well post it - enjoy!

Joyce is definitively positive, by this point in her life, that she is a bad luck charm. Mishaps seem to follow her around.

She has been responsible for far more than her fair share of ladder slippages, elevator malfunctions and power outages. This far in, things like this didn't scare her. They barely even startled her. She remembered one night she was working late at the store and had to duck into the storage area for something. The lights went out and two dozen boxes of cereal fell down on her head. She didn't even flinch. She just sighed and cursed whatever God had it in for her.

Today, Joyce had been roped by Flo (who else) into helping set up the community hall for the children's matinee the next day. She had just dropped by to say hi to Hopper (she was passing, it made sense. Why do people read so much into these things? Two people had asked her if they were dating, and she just had to politely explain they were friends, but honestly, is it really that weird that just because she was headed across town she happened to come by and say hi, and then since she knew she was stopping by, was it so weird that she brought him some leftover chicken casserole? Honestly, they were not "Acting like a married couple." That just wasn't true) and on her way out, Flo asked if she would be okay to help out to help on Saturday and said they need as many hands as they could get. Joyce didn't get an opportunity to say no.

By eight-thirty at night, everyone had gone home, except for her and Hopper, who was busying himself lying the programs on the uncomfortable plastic chairs they had spent the day moving. Joyce was sitting cross-legged on the stage, picking at leftover Chinese food.

"Why do you do this?" She asked out of the blue, breaking the

silence. "It doesn't really seem like your scene."

Hopper turned around and looked at Joyce. From where he stood - well back from the stage, back far enough to have to raise his voice - she looked even smaller than usual. "Well, what do you think is my scene is, if not setting up rows of the most pointlessly uncomfortable chairs in the community hall?"

Joyce shrugged, swallowing a piece of pork. "Bar. Sleeping with women who you forget to call. Something that doesn't involve voluntary man-hours."

"First of all, I... I'm not really dating at the moment." He lowered his gaze and threw down another program onto another drab chair. "And second of all, this crap isn't voluntary for me. You take an oath when you join the force, not sure if you've heard of it. To serve and protect and all that."

Joyce raised an eyebrow. "You never used to take that vow particularly seriously, if I recall correctly."

"Well, times change, don't they? And don't eat all of the mu shu - shit!"

The lights had gone out suddenly, giving Hopper and Joyce no warning before they were thrust into darkness. Hopper had misjudged where a chair was and tripped over with a bang. Joyce hadn't react at all.

"Shit! Joyce! Joyce, are you okay? What happened?" Hopper fumbled around for his flashlight.

"I'm fine, Hop," Joyce called. "Probably a power outage. Do you have a flashlight or something?"

Hopper replied by clicking the torch on and shining it directly in Joyce's face.

"Jesus! For God's sake, Hop, what are you, twelve?" She threw down a plastic fork with more gusto than necessary and tapped the stage beside her, the sound echoing through the hall. "Come up and sit here, I'm gonna strain my voice."

Hopper's footsteps echoed through the dark emptiness of the hall as he padded toward the stage in the blackness. It was eerily quiet - no noise was leaking in from outside on the main street. A silent night, he thought.

"How can you see in here?" He asked, the question muffled as he held his torch between his teeth and pawed around for footing to hoist himself onto the stage. "It's pitch black!"

There was silence for a moment, then some shuffling, before Joyce replied softly, "I'm a walking disaster. Things like this follow me, a bit."

There was resignation in her voice, and any trace of playfulness was gone suddenly, like - no pun intended - someone flipped a switch. Hop couldn't see her face, but he knew her well enough to know she would no longer be smiling. "These sorts of things... I just, kind of attract them, you know? Like... karma, or something."

"Karma?" He almost scoffed. Joyce was the best person he knew - Hopper had seen enough things to have a little moral flexibility on his side, but Joyce was deserving of no karmic retribution. She was deserving of the whole world, maybe, but had done nothing to deserve any form of karma. "Joyce, you haven't done a bad thing in your life." Unsure what to do, Hopper placed the torch down, illuminating a patch of the deserted, dusty community hall, and placed an arm around Joyce's shoulder. She was shaking, and only then, in the faint torchlight, did he realise that her eyes were damp with unshed tears. Her breathing was beginning to turn to gasps, and Hopper understood that this was the start of some form of panic attack.

He knew Joyce had anxiety issues. A lot of people did, but few acknowledged her as a person with 'anxiety'. She was just Joyce, to them - skittish Joyce, always on the edge but never falling off. Hopper understood, though, and he knew she was grateful for that. He had been in her position, once, and he knew that it came with complex intricacies - things unique to each sufferer. Some people described it as crushing, or weighty, but that wasn't Hopper's experience - more like an inescapable cloud of oxygen he couldn't escape breathing in - so he wouldn't assume what anxiety was like for

others - or for Joyce.

Not many people could calm Joyce out of a panic attack - Jonathan had once mentioned, not cavalierly but not in confidence, that for as long as he could remember Lonnie was never able to. Jonathan could - Hopper supposed he had practice - and there had been instances of Karen and a few other choice friends managing to. Hopper felt a pang of worry - he had never tried, until everything happened with Will. It saddened him - and angered him more than he would let on - that the carefree girl he dated in high school was made taut and broken by Lonnie. That Joyce was blamed for anxiety years with him - and then years of him flaking out on her - had given her.

"Joyce, you're safe," Hopper reached out to steady her, his voice deliberately calm. "You're here. You're not alone."

Joyce shuddered in his arms, and Hopper cautiously added "I'm here. I'm here with you, Joyce."

Her breathing was laboured, and, wriggling in Hop's arms, she tried to balance her weight as not to collapse back on him. "I... I thought, for a minute, tha- that I was back there."

She didn't need to elaborate. Hopper knew exactly what she meant, and for a moment, when the torch had illuminated the dark hall filled with dust, he had had the same thought. "You're not," He murmured into her hair as she relaxed - just a little, just enough for Hopper to feel the worst had passed. "You're not back there. You're safe, and so are Will and Jonathan. It's all okay."

"Okay," She smiled. "I damn wish."

Hopper laughed a little. "We'll get there, Joyce. One day, things will be better, and we'll get there. Together."

Joyce leaned further into Hopper's coat, and reached out for his hand. "Together."

2. the smell of fir at christmastime

Notes for the Chapter:

This is a Christmas prompt from tumblr that I wrote for the lovely @starmammke. Interested in a prompt/ have an idea? Come talk to me, I'm not scary!

Jim Hopper loved Christmastime.

This was somewhat of a confession for him, as not many people were privy to this information. But as a child, he spent hours on end staring up at the giant looming tree covered in twinkling lights and smelling that Christmas smell of fir and nutmeg and gingerbread. His mother used to smile at him and watch him investigate each and every present, even the ones that weren't for him, and she'd tell him that he had to wait until Christmas Day to find out what they were.

Then there were Christmases with Sarah and Diane - Christmases filled with love and lots of cocoa - after Sarah went to bed on Christmas Eve Jim and Diane would share a cocoa with bourbon, before they filled Sarah's stocking and went to bed themselves. Christmas had always been a time of joy, and of peace for Hopper, and to this day it filled him with a childish kind of anticipation.

Joyce, however, hated Christmas, with a dull, passionate ache inside her chest. It always brought stress in her low-income house - what present was cheapest to buy but didn't seem scummy, how much could we spend on dinner, how many relatives could we invite who wouldn't judge the state of our home... Once upon a time, she had held a childlike excitement for the holiday, but that had faded with age, and as her attitude hardened, her outlook on Christmas grew duller.

She tried to put on a happy face for her boys, throughout their childhood. She tried to hide that their presents were taken advance and then worked out of her paycheque because Lonnie had spent all their money on booze. She tried to hide that she was run raw from trying to keep the three of them afloat after Lonnie left and still find

the spare time and money to put up decorations. Of course, Jonathan and Will noticed - children always do - but they hid it well, and they didn't mind. They loved their mom more than anything in the world.

So one December day when Joyce stopped by to talk to Hopper at his lunch break - they had stopped pretending that this ritual was anything but normal, just like the ritual of Hopper coming over for dinner had long since stopped coming with an excuse about the house needing a paint job or needing something from Jonathan - and Hopper casually asked when Joyce was putting up her tree, Joyce stiffened.

"I... I don't really know. The boys don't really want a tree - if they did, I'd be more than happy to put one up but... they know I don't really like Christmas."

Hopper dropped his fork into his casserole.

"You don't like Christmas?" Hopper asked incredulously. "It's the best time of the year!"

Joyce laughed, twirling her fork in the air. "You sound like a child!"

"Well, Christmas is... fun," Hopper smiled, and there was a hint of defensiveness in the expression. "Why don't you like it?"

"It's... complicated." Joyce sighed, looking down at her lap. "Experience, I guess. It was never very fun in my house." She turned her gaze on Hopper, a glint of mischief in her eye. "But you seem to love it! Who knew that gruff Chief Hopper liked Christmas so much?"

"It's the one holiday I always loved," Hopper gave Joyce a little grin. "Throughout thick and thin, you know, it was always some kind of bright spot. And it is a sin that you, of all people, Joyce Byers, don't like it."

"What's that supposed to mean?"

"Well, you're Joyce. You have sons. You just seem like the kind of person who would like Christmas."

"Well, I don't."

"Well, you're going to," Hopper grinned, clicking the lid onto his empty Tupperware container. "I am going to give you a Christmas education. Will's staying over at the Wheelers' tonight, right? And Jonathan's - "

"Out taking pictures for his portfolio." Joyce nodded.

"Great. Is seven okay?" Hopper said, getting up and moving toward the door. Joyce threw her hands up.

"I haven't said yes yet!"

"I know," Hopper smirked. "But you don't mind."

And in her heart, she really didn't.

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"Hey, Hop," Joyce opened the door. "So we're doing this then - whoa!"

Hopper was dragging an enormous tree into Joyce's living room. "What the hell is that!?" Joyce exclaimed.

"It's a Christmas tree. Don't tell me you've never seen a Christmas fir before!" Hopper sounded almost outraged, although that must have had something to do with the fact that he was heaving with the effort of trying to upright a tree as big as himself.

"Not a real one," Joyce said, slightly defensively. "Not one of my own, at least. This is Indiana, not Vermont!"

"You are a sinner, Joyce Byers."

"And you are a man-child, Jim Hopper."

It took a few hours, at least, but Hopper was successful in giving Joyce a complete Christmas education. He helped her decorate the tree and brought an assortment of Santa figurines ("These are from the two-dollar-shop!") to place on the mantle, and after Joyce let on that yes, her and Jonathan and Will did have stockings once upon a time and they were most definitely around somewhere, he spent a

half-hour digging through her crap in the sunroom to find them.

Now, the two of them were sitting cross-legged under the tree, breathing in the smell of fir and snow. They each had a beer between their legs, which they would lift and drink from occasionally, but they mostly sat in still silence.

“This was fun,” Joyce said softly, after a while. “Thank you.”

“It was fun for me too, Joyce,” Hop turned and faced her. “I’m glad you had a nice time.”

“For years, the only good thing about Christmas was watching Will and Jonathan have fun... I think, somehow, it feels more like a holiday.”

“I’m glad.”

“Me too.”

They were both leaning in closer as they spoke, until their faces were so close Joyce could see the flecks of gold in Hopper’s eyes. And then, suddenly, they were kissing, cross-legged on the floor like teenagers, breathing in the smell of fir and Christmas in the cool night air.

3. o silent night

Notes for the Chapter:

Christmas prompt from tumblr that I wrote for @ballroompink!

Christmas Eve in Hawkins wasn't silent. There were people wondering about in the early hours of the night - doing last minute shopping, caroling, attending midnight church services. This wasn't a bad thing - it brought its own kind of ambience, and filled the air with anticipation. Like there was something big coming. For some reason, in Hawkins, Christmas was a big deal for everyone. The excitement was infectious - but not in the jumping up-and-down kind of way. In the thrilling, heart-beating-with-excitement kind of way.

However at the Byers home, out by the woods in the dark, it was very nearly silent. The only sounds were the birds and insects chirping in the woods and the sounds of trains rushing by in the distance. And Joyce's slow, even breathing beside Hopper.

He reached out and absentmindedly ran a hand through Joyce's hair. She held her anxiety in her face and shoulders, Joyce, and she was never so relaxed as she was she was in sleep. His gaze rested on her face, and careful not to wake her, he lay down beside her and took in the weight of her next to him, and the soft lines on her face, and the calming rise and fall of her stomach against the blankets.

"Merry Christmas, Hop!" Joyce smiled, reaching out and capturing Hopper in a hug. "It's nice of you to come - you didn't have to, you know." She gave him that patented Joyce 'I'm-grateful-but-you-so-didn't-have-to-do-this face.

"No, I wanted to come," he murmured into her hair, trying to ignore the quickened beating of his heart. "I brought presents."

"Well, Will is going to love you forever," Joyce pulled away and motioned for him to sit down at the table. "This seat's yours, apparently - Will assigned seats."

Hopper, who had set his gifts down on the side table by the couch which had been miraculously cleared of half-read books and scraps of post-its and pens that had run out of ink, noticed that his chair was directly opposite Joyce. He would be sitting there, with nowhere else to look, for a whole meal, and though he believed that for the majority of the time that he had realised he had feelings for Joyce he had maintained remarkable composure about the whole thing (Flo disagreed) he had no idea what sitting across from this beautiful woman for hours at a time would do to him.

Joyce stirred in her sleep suddenly, a jolt of movement that sent the covers flying. Hopper's immediate reaction was to reach out and soothe, but he paused - not everyone liked to be touched, after all. What if she woke? Hopper didn't want her to wake. He just wanted her to be okay.

"Hey, Hop, pass the potatoes!" Will grinned, reaching his hands out for the enormous bowl. It was twice the size of Will's head and full to the brim with mashed potatoes.

"You sure you can handle the weight, kid?" He asked, only half serious.

"Positive - whoa!" Hopper dropped the bowl into Will's outstretched hands and the kid let out a sudden yelp. Jonathan snorted, which earned him a glare from his mother.

Jonathan had been somewhat quiet - though Hopper couldn't say uncharacteristically - over the meal. Not discontented quiet, just kind of not really there. Hopper would have asked, but he respected the boy's privacy, and the fact that maybe he didn't want to bring whatever was bothering him up in front of his mom and baby brother. Hopper just hoped it had nothing to do with him.

The meal continued, peppered intermittently with easy conversation and warm silence. Will talked about the comic he won from Lucas in a bet, and what Mr Clarke was teaching them before break, and Jonathan spoke a little about his photography portfolio. Hopper knew he was aiming at NYU, and assured the kid that he'd be fine - they'd be lucky to have him. Joyce laughed, and smiled, and every time Hopper risked a glance up at her something he was vaguely unsure of - but he knew couldn't be good - constricted in his chest, and he had to look away, or risk his secret being

exposed.

“Hey Mom,” Will piped up hopefully, toward the end of the night, just after Jonathan began clearing, “After dinner can we watch special Christmas TV?”

“Sure,” Joyce smiled, sipping her scotch and ruffling Will’s hair. “It is Christmas Eve, remember - and no peeking at your presents!” She called after her son, who was already scampering off to his bedroom for something. Hopper laughed.

There was so much commotion, so much noise, in the house at Christmastime. There was so much life. It almost generated its own kind of energy - a contagious, voluminous energy that was untouchable but you could feel it, if that made sense. Hopper wasn’t sure it did.

Now, though, as he lay beside Joyce in the quiet dark, his head inches from hers on the pillow because she had said that she didn’t mind him staying in her bed (which either meant he was one-hundred-percent a platonic relationship or maybe, just maybe, he could allow himself to hope that Joyce wanted something more, too) and the smell of snow in the air, he disagreed with his prior sentiment. Christmas was lively. Christmas had energy, and fun. But there was a brief window, where there was silence. Every person on Earth was silent in anticipation for what was to come.

And Hopper wasn’t sure what was to come, but he knew he would treasure this moment of silence, always.

4. sugar kisses (christmas prompt for starmammke)

“This is way too much food,” Hopper laughed, staring at the mountains of Tupperware containers that Joyce had produced - seemingly magically - from a tote bag that seemed much too small to hold that amount of food.

Joyce tilted her head and raised her eyebrows. “So, I do, maybe *half* of the cooking for the community Christmas drive and you’re the one insulting me? Maybe I should take all of this home to Will and Jonathan. I’m sure they’d appreciate it, you know. Jonathan says dorm food is -”

“Okay, okay, point taken,” Hopper smiled gently and bent down to kiss her on the head. He still wasn’t used to doing that. It was so casual, a simple thing he’d been denied for a long time. He liked the way it always raised a small blush to her cheeks and a smile to her lips. He liked the way she’d close her eyes and bob her head a little. He liked that when he wrapped his arms around her tiny frame she wasn’t shaking - she was just warm, and she smelled like almonds and lilies (her body wash, he knew) and always a little like the Byers house, which he associated with comfort and family and warmth. It sounded childish, but he just liked being with her - being able to touch her and make her smile and not have to hide the fact that he ‘looked at her like she hung the moon’ - Flo’s words, not his - every time she walked into a room.

There was something so complex about Joyce - she was an enigma and there was no way Hopper could ever keep up with her - sometimes he even wondered if he could be allowed to keep her - but he would try his damndest. Maybe Jim Hopper deserved the world - he didn’t think he did, but maybe someone thought that much of him - but he would give it to Joyce Byers without a second thought.

“Thank you,” he murmured, so no one but Joyce could hear him.

“For baking four different sweet Christmas dishes plus roasting vegetables and making stuffing?” She inquired, a smirk playing at her lips. “I would say it was nothing, but...”

Hopper laughed softly. He was pleased to see Joyce come out of her shell, if only just a bit since the Incident - the one no one liked to put a name to. He had privately theorised that what happened when Will was twelve was simply the last straw for Joyce - her worst fear, realised in horrific, explicitly terrible memories of a dark underworld and a science research institute and that awful dread in the pit of your stomach. Maybe, once Joyce saw her deepest, darkest fear actualised in, and everything turned out okay, her stress began to lessen. There was less of a weight on her, something no longer hanging over her mind. Because the worst had happened already, there was nothing, really, left to fear.

“Just thank you.” He said.

Joyce smiled at his words, and it reached her eyes. There was a warmth and liveliness in them, that always made him want to smile back. *Goddamnit, Hop*, he thought to himself. *You really are smitten.*

“Well, you’re welcome,” Joyce said, outstretching a hand and passing him a cookie with a Santa face painted on it. He took it and raised an eyebrow at her. “It’s a sugar cookie. Will did the decorating. It’s practically offensive to us if you don’t try one.”

Hopper grinned back at Joyce and took a bite. It was sweet - well, it was a sugar cookie - and sort of melt-in-the-mouth, like a macaron. It tasted a little bit like Christmas - maybe Joyce put nutmeg or cloves or something in it. Hopper, admittedly, had somewhat of a sweet tooth, but it was sugary and Christmassy and he loved it.

There were voices starting to gather around them now, in the cold winter air, looking for some hot food. The food at the Christmas drive was a Hawkins tradition and for years, Joyce had taken Will and Jonathan to it to get them out of the house. Before Joyce found her feet, Christmas was depressing in the Byers house - there was never a tree, or lights, only a wreath on the door, some holly sprigs Joyce would take them out to find and little presents on the side table that Joyce knew weren’t the things her sons really wanted. But Jonathan wasn’t due to get back from New York until tomorrow, and Will was at the Wheelers’ doing a gift exchange. And she was here with someone else.

“Delicious,” Hop grinned, and Joyce laughed as he leaned down and kissed her, his lips tasting like sugar and cloves and the snowy Christmas air.

5. three sentence fic challenge - western au

Summary for the Chapter:

this is 3 sentences long, and only here because i promised EVERYTHING FROM TUMBLR. jopper 3-sentence western au for starmammke.

Smoke drifted heavenward from the barrel of the gun, the firing noise enough to startle the cawing birds on the horizon. A single tear traced its way down the shooter's face as the pistol fell from her hand and her feet guided her toward the dying man.

"I'm so sorry, my love," Joyce whispered in sheriff's ear, her fingers delicately brushing the wound in the man's chest as he drew a shaky last breath, his fingers closing around hers.

6. Chapter 6

Summary for the Chapter:

same as previous 3-sentence teacher/parent au for obeydontstray.

“Do you even know the first thing about baseball?”

The question was posed teasingly, but with his arms around her midriff, Joyce was finding it somewhat hard to think clearly.

She replied with a laugh as Will pitched a ball in their direction, which she missed by too many feet to even keep a shred of sporting dignity - “What do you think?!”

7. i'll never get sick of you

Notes for the Chapter:

birthday present for @ObeyDontStray. high school jopper au, sick/hurt-comfort.

Joyce had always loved the wintertime as a child. She got it from her mom. Her mom used to braid her hair and tell her that when it snowed, good things happened. Winter meant snow. Snow meant Christmas, and no school, and flakes landing on her nose and sparkling in the light.

Her love for the season dampened after the death of her mother. The snow became tinted with a hideous shade of bittersweet, and her extremities grew nearly frozen after nights spent curled on her mother's frosty grave and mornings spent in stinging showers. The first time she didn't think about her mother's death in the wintertime was over six years after it passed.

February, 1955.

Joyce's heart was heavy. She had thought about visiting her mom today, but she didn't want to. She wanted to wait for it to snow, so there was at least a little magic in the air. It was stupid, and she knew they probably wouldn't get much more snow that year. But she just didn't want any more pain today.

The halls of Hawkins High School were fairly empty. A nasty bout of flu had been making its way around the town, and most people were falling prey. Joyce didn't. She was usually pretty impervious to the flu, for some reason. Maybe all those winter nights she lay out in the snow did her some good, after all. She had just finished her last class

of the day, and since none of her friends were here to procrastinate her trip home with, she figured she might as well visit her mom. Couldn't really make her week worse. Her dad was having an episode, and she didn't particularly feel like going home.

She trudged through the sludge on the sidewalk, dragging her sneakers through the wet. Her satchel thumped against her side with each step she took, and only she grew more apprehensive the closer she got to Hawkins' Graveyard. She wanted nothing more than to be curled up in a booth at the diner with Hop and Benny, drinking the brilliant cocoa they had, and sneaking bourbon into it to make it even better. She wanted to be comforted, and she never really wanted that. Joyce knew how to take care of herself, but today she just wanted nothing more than to wallow in self-pity and use her friends to make her forget about how shitty her life was at this point.

She had reached the gate of the graveyard. Hoisting her bag back onto her shoulder, she reached over to unlatch it, when -

“Joyce!”

Joyce spun herself around at the sound of her name. Hop was trudging toward her in the snow, running in that awkward way you do when you don't want the wet ground to bog you down. He was wearing his enormous waterproof coat and a pair of threadbare plaid pants, and his ears and nose were pink from the cold. Shaking away any thoughts of cute he looked against the wintery backdrop of Hawkins, Joyce narrowed her eyes.

“Hop? Are you in your pyjamas?”

“Yeah, “ he murmured upon reaching her, wapping his arms around himself. “I had a feeling you’d come here today, you’ve been saying how you’ve been putting off coming...”

Joyce didn’t bother on making an amused remark on the fact that he actually listened to her when they spoke, even though his attitude often pointed to him being an ignorant prick. She had been putting off visiting her mom, and she was touched that Hop cared.

“It’s freezing out here, and I was wondering if you’d rather come round to mine... I know you don’t want to go home.”

Joyce bit her lip. She *did* want to go to his place. She loved his place. She loved his nice parents and lounge room and fridge full of real food. She loved spending time with him. She wasn’t entirely sure the feeling was reciprocated though, and she didn’t want to intrude. It wasn’t his fault she was afraid of her own front door.

Almost as if he read her mind, Hopper tilted his head and attempted to meet her gaze. This was difficult as she was a foot smaller than him and already directing her line of vision at her scruffy shoes, but his voice was pleasantly comforting to her ears and his hand was a welcome presence on her shoulder.

“You wouldn’t be intruding,” He said. “Dad’s at work and Mom’s at Carol Crawford’s house learning new casserole recipes, or as I would more accurately put it, acquiring new torture devices.” Joyce smiled weakly at the meagre attempt at a joke, and looked up to meet Hop’s eyes. There was an emotion in them that she couldn’t quite place. Maybe she didn’t want to.

“Okay,” she agreed, hoisting her duffel higher on her shoulder and allowing Hop to place an arm around her shoulder as they walked, ignoring the fluttering that action caused in her stomach. After all, it was just Hop.

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“Ah-choo!”

Joyce rolled her eyes. “I swear to God, Jimmy Hopper, if you just called me over here to make me sick, I will do my best to ensure you remain in this feeble state for as long as I can possibly drag it out.”

It had become clear to Joyce just how sick her friend was when he had shut his front door behind her and shed his coat. His skin was clammy and his face vaguely colourless. The red on his nose wasn’t just from the cold. There were cold and flu pill bottles and vaguely repulsive used tissues scattered in a six-foot radius from the butt-indent on the couch. Joyce was starting to understand his mother’s flight from her best friend’s infectious toxicity.

“Please don’t call me Jimmy.” Hop cringed. “I’m not five.”

“Sure you’re not, Mr. Man-flu.” Joyce was sitting cross-legged in the armchair opposite his couch, watching him with mild amusement. “Besides, I didn’t move to Hawkins until I was ten, and people definitely still called you Jimmy then.”

Hopper scowled - *a face which I refuse to categorise as utterly adorable*, Joyce chastised herself - and Joyce's small smirk widened.

"Hasn't anyone ever taught you not to tease people when they're dying?"

"Whatever you say, Mr Man-flu."

She refused to kiss him, despite the teasing twinkle in his (not at all attractive, no way) eyes.

"Do want me to make cocoa, Hawkins Diner-style?" She offered. Hopper perked up a little.

"Bourbon?"

"Only always."

He smiled softly at her. "I'd love that. It's not every day Little Joyce offers to make you cocoa."

Joyce turned in mock-offence at the sound of her old nickname. Hopper's face was teasing. "You're lucky you get cocoa at all, treating me like that."

Hopper chuckled, then turned suddenly serious. “I really do appreciate it, Joyce. You know that, right?”

Joyce’s eyes suddenly began to sting with unshed tears. She busied herself removing the cocoa powder from Mrs Hopper’s cupboard and nodded emphatically so she didn’t need to face the boy behind her.

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She was the most important person in his entire life. She was beautiful, and she was sitting so close to him on his own couch that he could feel the warmth radiating off of her. Oh, and she had a whipped cream moustache that he really wanted to kiss off her goddamn gorgeous face.

He knew it was stupid, having a crush on Joyce. He couldn’t tell you the moment he slipped into it - hell, maybe he’d had a crush on her since he met her, ten years old and fearless in the face of childhood adversity. There was no possible way he could be with her. This was high school. He didn’t even want to be in a relationship. It was stupid, and yet.

And yet when her warm brown eyes looked up at him like that, he wanted to kiss her. When she placed the back of her cool hand to his forehead to test his temperature he wanted to wrap it around his neck and kiss her. When she stood in the kitchen and smirked at his flu symptoms he wanted to kiss that smirk off her lips.

Damn. He had it bad.

“Hop?” Joyce asked, concerned. He’d been quiet a while.

“Yeah?”

“You okay? You look kind of... off.”

“I’m delirious with fever, remember?” He glanced down at his cocoa, unable to meet Joyce’s eyes.

“I’ve been friends with you for six years. What’s wrong?” She persisted.

Hopper responded by shifting ever so slightly closer and meeting her eyes. He wasn’t sure what Joyce saw in them, but hers widened, and she moved to mirror him.

“Hop...”

He didn’t say any more. He just gave in, and reached out to kiss her, holding her head in his hands as she responded to his every movement, kissing him back with matched eagerness. *Well*, Hop thought to himself, *that’s probably a good sign*.

He only withdrew when his lungs angrily demanded so. Touching his forehead to hers, the only thing he thought to say was, “Don’t kiss

me. You'll get sick."

Joyce smiled tenderly against his lips. "It's worth it. You'll make me cocoa."